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JERUSALEM TO THE DEAD SEA.

'SAR, de horses is ready!'

At the shrill summons, I face round, and see my cook, butler, guide, and *chargé d'affaires pro tem.*, embodied in the single person of 'that well-known and excellent dragoman, Abraham Mordecai,' whose black shining face, and robe of white bordered with crimson, always remind me of a newly polished grate in its summer 'paperings.' Yesterday morning, my two comrades and I arrived from Jaffa, after riding all night (with Arab saddles) along a road like the stair of a ruined lighthouse; and now, having reposed our exhausted frames by tramping all round Jerusalem, ascending Mount Olivet, making the tour of the Holy Sepulchre, and visiting the Mosque of Omar, we are now (2 P.M.) starting off again for Bethany, Jericho, the Dead Sea, the Jordan, and Heaven knows where beside.

Fortunately, I have just returned from Arabia, and am therefore case-hardened to the overthrow of my cherished ideas respecting the 'Arab steed' and his master—ideas derived chiefly from a well-known ballad, in which a Bedouin persistently apostrophises his horse as 'sold,' although the only one sold eventually seems to have been the intending purchaser, seeing that the Arab finishes by coolly mounting his beast and riding off, leaving the bargain suspended *sine die*. By this time I have seen both horse and man in their true colours—the former as a gaunt, slouching, undersized screw; the latter as a long, lean, dirty, sly-looking, useless vagabond, who holds that his duty toward his neighbour is to run off with all that he has, and to cut his throat if he makes any objection. This salutary experience reconciles me to the nondescript beasts which we are to mount, and the two scarecrows in white and yellow who are to serve as our escort; but my comrades, not yet acclimatised to the 'monster-breeding Orient,' express their surprise and displeasure 'with that freedom of speech which is the birthright of every Englishman.'

'Nice lot of beasts, eh, Jim? Look as if they'd just escaped from the siege of Paris!'

'And a swell escort we've got—rather! If we want a stock of old iron, we know where to go. How much would you insure your life for, before firing that fellow's pistols?'

'Twig that party in the yellow cloak—he's a nice young man for a small cannibal tea-party! Hang me if he don't look like a sausage rolled up in an omelet!'

This *Saturday Review* eclogue is suddenly interrupted by our *chef d'escadron's* shrill cry of 'Ready, gentle-*men!*' and by a forward movement on the part of our 'two cavaliers.' Each settles himself in his saddle—the horses' heads are turned towards the Jaffa Gate—the swarthy, white-coated sentinels give our cavalcade a valedictory grin as it clatters through the arch—

And roundly we ride away.

It is half-past two on a glorious May afternoon, and the sun lights up tower and battlement as we skirt the old gray wall, and pace along the ridge upon which the hosts of Godfrey de Bouillon stood ranged nearly eight hundred years ago. Downward into the deep fosse of the Valley of Jehoshaphat, which we reach by a prolonged slide down a kind of waterfall of rolling stones; upward again along the slopes of terraced Olivet, crowned by its little gray convent; round the elbow of the hill, whence, eighteen centuries ago, a wayworn traveller from the farther side 'beheld the city and wept over it;' then over ridge after ridge of crumbling rock, on which the sun smites fiercely; till at length we draw rein beside a little knot of ruinous houses, and hear our guide announce: 'Dere de house of Lazarus—dis Bethany!'

We turn to the left through the little village, and halt in front of the traditional site of the great miracle—a low square aperture almost level with the road, down which we wriggle ourselves wrong side foremost, with no very clear idea how we are to get out again. But, once inside, the charm is complete. After the blinding glare and heat without, this cool, shadowy, voiceless crypt is like a

haven of refuge. The repose of centuries broods upon the low massive walls and earthen floor, on which our steps fall without a sound. It is indeed a holy place—a spot where, in that age of iron, some weary spirit, worn with long watching and waiting, might well have been content to lay itself to rest for ever. One can almost imagine a shrouded figure, still in the stillness of death, and 'bound hand and foot with grave-clothes,' in that farther corner where the shadows lie so deep; and hark! do we not hear from without a confused hum of voices, and a sound of low, dreary weeping, followed by the silence of intense expectation. 'Lazarus, come forth!' Clear and commanding sounds the calm voice through that deathlike silence; and see! the still figure stirs—it rises—it stands erect; and the Living Dead comes slowly up from the nether gloom, and stands wan and ghastly in the dazzling sunlight, gazing round him with eyes still haggard from the secrets of the grave.

But there is no time now to yield to the influences of the spot. Our leader's shrill call comes echoing down the funnel-like entrance, and we must go. One long draught of lemonade before vaulting into the saddle, and we are off again, along a gentle incline, growing ever steeper and steeper, till at length it plunges in one great slide down into a vast, deep, craggy ravine, in the depths of which a dry water-course bares its parched white furrow to the blistering sunshine. At the top of this final 'shelve,' the Arabs dismount to lead their horses, and we, as in duty bound, follow suit.

'By Jove!' says my younger comrade, Freshman (a tall, light-haired fellow of genuinely Anglo-Saxon type), stretching himself with an air of relief, 'I seem to have got some legs, after all!'

'So do I,' answers Black ruefully; 'but then I seem to have got somebody else's instead of my own!'

At the foot of the descent we water our beasts at a small tank (the placing of which in this desolate spot ought to earn many a prayer for the 'kind soul' of the Oriental 'Sybil Grey' who built it), refresh ourselves with another horn of lemonade all round, look at our watches, and then rouse our nags into a trot, for if we are to be at Jericho by eight o'clock this evening, it behoves us to make haste.

And now comes the wildest part of our journey. An immense silence—a weird-*forgotten* look, as of a dispeopled world—an utter, dead loneliness—an endless network of crumbling ridges, and dry torrent-beds, and black tunnel-like gorges, and narrow paths skirting dark precipices, till I begin to recall Mr Kingsley's grim picture of the 'spider's web' of dreary mountain glens leading ever upward and upward, in the centre of which Periphetes the Robber sat watching for his prey. And presently, in one of these same gorges, I do indeed meet with something which, by skilful management, might almost be worked up into an adventure. I have got considerably in advance of my party, and am in the narrowest part of the gully, where the jutting rocks barely allow two men to pass abreast, when a tall gaunt Bedouin, with a huge rusty matchlock on his shoulder, comes with his long swinging stride round a sharp corner, and halts directly in front of me. Of course he must be a robber; and of course I ought, according to established precedent, to leap from my saddle, and fell him to the earth with one of those 'swift, sure, irresistible blows' which Guy Livingstone or Sir Fulke Exceldoune used to be so fond of delivering. But I don't. I merely hold out my hand, and say (in nearly all the Arabic I know) 'Peace be with you, my friend!' The scarecrow extends a bony claw with a hoarse 'Welcome, my lord!' and vanishes among the rocks as the foremost of my party comes clattering into view.*

Towards the middle of the afternoon we receive a reinforcement of one—the young sheik of the tribe to which our escort belong, who comes rushing at full gallop along the very brink of the precipice, his white burnouse streaming behind him, his long lance quivering in his hand, and the figures of horse and rider thrown into bold relief by the dark rocks behind them—a nearer approach to the mythical Arab cavalier than I ever saw either before or after. He is a fine active young fellow, with much of that unstudied grace and courtesy which, in the East, usually characterises the man who rules men. He talks freely enough, in a mixed dialect of broken English and rippling Arabic, about what he has seen and done; and hints without much shyness at his simple political creed of taxing all men alike. On this latter point he is evidently past conversion. 'The pacha,' says he naïvely, 'robs all men—so do we. We take, perhaps, a few piastres at a time; the pacha takes thousands upon thousands every month—how, then, are we worse than the pacha?' The question is not easy to answer; for, in truth, the official system of Palestine runs very much like our old nursery tale: 'The fire began to burn the stick, the stick began to beat the dog, the dog began to bite the pig.' Every government employé, from the governor-general to the custom-house officer, pays high for his place, and must indemnify himself by fleecing his subordinates. The grand-vizier exacts tribute from the governor-general, the governor-general squeezes the pachas, the pachas rob their subalterns, the subalterns plunder the people; and thus (as M. Herzen said with bitter truth of an equally trampled race) 'no change of government can affect the people, for, whatever happens, they are sure to be robbed.' Any man who wishes to judge for himself of the fruits of Turkish rule, cannot do better than travel in Arabia or Palestine.

The sun is just setting as we reach the summit of the pass from which begins the final descent to the plain of Jericho, and turn to look our last upon a panorama which may bear comparison with anything in Switzerland. Beneath us lies, range beyond range, the vast labyrinth of mountain-ridges through which we have struggled, now bathed in a sea of glory by the last rays of the sun. To our right, the ground falls away from under our very feet in a sheer precipice several hundred feet in depth; while on the farther side of the great gulf a mighty bastion of naked rock towers up in one great sweep of unbroken blackness, blotting the lustrous sky like a threatening thunder-cloud. Halfway down the cliff (*pasted*, as it were, on the face of the precipice), hang the ruins of a small convent, built in the evil days when men fled to rocks and caves for refuge from their fellow-men;

* This, I suspect, is what most of the robber-stories one hears would amount to, if carefully sifted. The Jericho road is now almost as safe as Regent Street.

and downward from it, a little ribbon of pathway, barely visible from where we stand, zigzags along that tremendous wall toward the distant valley. All this, seen beneath the splendour of a Syrian sunset, makes me feel, not for the first time, how utterly powerless are mere words to describe the grand painting of nature.

But the glory is short-lived. As we turn our horses' heads toward the valley, the sun plunges below the horizon, and instantly the whole scene is wrapped in that dim, gray, shadowy semi-twilight which is more ghostly than any darkness, through which the stern features of the surrounding landscape loom weird and spectral. Down, down, ever down, with the slow measured march of a funeral procession, while each and all become utterly silent, without knowing why. At length our leader's shrill voice is heard, bidding us dismount and lead our beasts, and mind where we step; but at the same moment, amid the sea of deepening darkness that spreads below, we espy a faint glimmer of light; and up into the still air goes a genuine English 'hurrah!' which the astonished echoes catch up and repeat.

At this point a sudden change comes over the counsels of my two comrades. All afternoon they have been vigilant and warlike, advertising their 'armed neutrality,' by cracking off their revolvers at every bird or even lizard that presents itself, happily without doing any mischief beyond frightening their horses a little; and have agreed that, as 'these Arab fellows can't be trusted, you know,' it will be advisable to keep watch in turn all night long. But now that we are at length close to the haven of rest, they suddenly decide that the place is safe enough, and that 'it's no good sitting up all night for nothing;' in which judgment I acquiesce with a secret chuckle. To practical John Bull, the chance of being robbed and murdered is a hypothetical, and therefore a contemptible danger; the loss of a night's rest is a real and less endurable one.

I need not describe our night encampment at Jericho, which, thanks to the all-providing Abraham (who seems to carry all the necessaries of travel in his pocket, like Peter Schlemihl's 'Gray Man'), is every whit as good as the hotel at Jerusalem, minus the mosquitoes. Men sleep well after two or three days of such work as we have been doing; and we are all ready to make oath that we have not been asleep more than five minutes, when, about three in the morning, Abraham's black face peers through the hangings of the tent, with 'Coffee, gentle-*men!*' We hastily swallow our morning cup, mount our beasts, and ride away into the darkness, like a band of reavers on a midnight foray. For the first hour all is dark and silent; and our shadowy cavalcade, flitting through the gloom without a sound, has a very ghostly effect. But, little by little, the blackness wanes into gray, the gray warms into crimson; long streaks of light shoot across the brightening sky, while the morning mists roll off like the smoke of a battle; till at last up rises the sun in all his glory, revealing the bare undulating moor with its thin herbage, the bold rocky ridge that bounds it to the right, the great dome of the Mount of Temptation in the background, and, far away to the front, the long narrow line of grayish-white that marks the shore of the still hidden Dead Sea.

At this point we halt to look about us, while our young sheik and his two henchmen improvise a tournament for our amusement. Two of them charge each other with levelled lances; the one drops helplessly from his saddle with a sharp cry, and the conqueror is couching his spear to despatch him, when the third, rushing in at full gallop, beats down the lance-point with his clubbed carabine, and drives back the assailant. The fallen man remounts (his horse having stood by him all the time), and the three whirl round each other in all the evolutions of a battle, thrusting, parrying, and wheeling, with a quickness which sight can hardly follow.

But the distant strip of beach now catches our eyes, and acts upon each and all like the far-off glitter of the Euxine upon the wearied Ten Thousand. We do not, indeed, shout 'Thalassa, Thalassa!' but we put our horses to their speed, and ride straight down upon the lake, every man for himself. Half an hour more, and, with a universal cheer, we come dashing out upon the smooth hard sand of the shore, and see before us the lonely Sea, in all its still and deadly beauty, prisoned between its great bastions of rock, without a ripple to break its smooth transparent surface, save where, far to the left, comes rushing into its pulseless crystal the black swirl of the Jordan.

After our hot, dusty ride, the temptation of the cool sparkling water is irresistible. We fling down our clothes anywhere and anyhow, and there is a regular race for 'first in,' at which Abraham, knowing what the result will be, grins sardonically. And well he may; for now the wonderful buoyancy of the water, which we have hitherto regarded as a mere 'travellers' yarn,' suddenly asserts itself in a very unexpected manner. The first who steps in makes two strides safely enough; but at the third he gives a sudden plunge forward, throws his feet spasmodically above the surface, and begins rolling over and over like a wounded whale. Before we can recover from our amazement at these manœuvres, we find ourselves imitating them whether we will or not; and now begins a series of antics, at which the Arabs on shore make the air ring with laughter. Black tries to swim according to rule, and finds himself flapping the air with his hands as if beating off mosquitoes, while his heels amuse themselves with a similar performance in the rear. I turn upon my back, but the moment I strike out with my feet, find myself revolving like a teetotum, without advancing an inch. Freshman attempts to put his feet to the ground, and instantly turns a somersault, as if trying to jump down his own throat, while the nauseous fluid (the flavour of which may be faintly represented by a judicious mixture of brimstone and old shoes) insinuates itself into his nose and mouth, making him cough and sputter as though he would sneeze his very brains out. Nevertheless, the exquisite clearness and delicious coolness of the water tempt us to remain 'in' a considerable time; but at length the galls and scratches, of which we all carry more than a few, begin to smart so intolerably from the action of the salt, that we are fain to beat a retreat—frosted all over, like bridecakes, with crystallised salt.

'Well,' observes Freshman, as we mount again, 'that would be a jolly sell for a fellow that wanted to commit suicide! He might jump in till all's blue, and be none the worse!'

'I believe you,' chimes in Black; 'this must be

the place where Paddy swore to drown himself or perish in the attempt!'

And the two ride forward to see whether Abraham is taking proper care of the two little canisters of Dead Sea water which they intend carrying back with them to England, in order to astonish their untravelled friends (as of course they must do, or where is the use of travelling at all) with the recital of their wonderful bathe, illustrated by the actual sight and taste of that marvellous fluid which has been the mainstay of every poet and rhetorician in want of a simile, since the days of Sir John Mandeville.

By this time it is past seven o'clock, and, upon this broad level sweep of unsheltered sand, the heat of the sun is already beginning to tell. Here, as in Arabia, the most delightful hours of the day are those from four to half-past six; but, after that, all who are caught loitering in the dominions of the great Fire-king find his face turned upon them in anger—an anger which few can venture to brave to the last. However, let him rage as he will, we must not be balked of our dip in the Jordan, which we want (as Black truly remarks) 'to wash off the salt of the Dead Sea.' So, putting our jaded beasts to the best canter which they can raise, we head straight for the dark belt of vegetation, which, winding in endless curves athwart the dull brassy yellow of the great plain, betrays the presence of the historic river.

Over ridge after ridge of crumbling sand, through hollow after hollow filled with dry dust, which flies in a cloud, making our eyes smart and our faces tingle; but the fresh morning breeze still softens the sun's wrath like Mercy pleading with Vengeance. And lo! as we crown a steep broken bank, below us sparkles the glancing current beneath its overshadowing leaves, like some dark eastern beauty smiling on the audacious Feringhees who have stolen upon her repose. But just as this pretty simile passes through my mind, my comrades break in with imagery of a very different order.

'Fine coffee, eh, George? only there might be a little more cream in it!'

'Or London porter—which I only wish it was!'

We strip and plunge in without a moment's hesitation, despite the cries of the Arabs, who come panting up to warn us that the current is very strong, and that we had better take care. Take care, indeed! Nonsense! In the boisterous days of early spring, when the river, swollen by the snows of a thousand hills, comes down in its wrath, such a thing might be; but this is the 24th of May, and we laugh the little rivulet to scorn. Who 'll be first on the other side? Here goes! Hollo! what's this? I can't keep my footing—my feet slip on the stones, and the stones slip from under them. And Black is down on his knees, as if waiting to be beheaded; and Freshman is rolling in the shallows, with a great smudge of black clay across his nose, while the Arabs on the bank screech like cats upon a garden-wall. This does not look much like getting across; but across we must get, whether or not. So we swim leisurely up the 'slack-water' in the hollow of the bend, till we are past the projecting bank round which the current sweeps—and then make a kind of salmon-leap right across, the rush of the stream itself driving us, as we had calculated, straight upon the opposite bank. To get back again (as Virgil formerly discovered in a more serious case) is a far less easy matter; but we manage it at last, and, satisfied with our achievement, paddle lazily about in the still water under the bank, or swing ourselves up and down upon the overhanging bushes which stand so thick upon the rich layer of black loam that lines the stream on either side. This last amusement, however, ends by exciting the hostility of the terrible 'bush-flies,' compared with which the ordinary mosquito is as a house-spider to a tarantula; and after being tattooed all over in a way that might have aroused the envy of a Maori, we are glad to retreat to the shore, and beat off the 'Midianites' (as Black appropriately styles them) with our big Turkish towels. The knock-down blows of the current have left their mark upon us in more than one severe bruise, from which the blood is flowing pretty freely; but nevertheless, after being thoroughly rubbed down with rough towels, and swallowing a few slices of orange which our inexhaustible Abraham has in readiness, we feel wonderfully invigorated. After the voluptuous cradle-rocking of the soft, sleepy, tideless lake, this boisterous, buffeting rush of living water acts like a reviving cordial; and we mount our horses again as fresh as if we had but newly started.

At this point (for our farther movements are to be merely retrograde) our journey through Palestine may be said to end; and a very enjoyable little journey it has been—a wholesome exercise for the time being, a seed of pleasant memories hereafter. For it is not while actually upon the road that the traveller most fully enjoys his travel; or, to speak more correctly, it is his body that enjoys it rather than his mind. The little every-day cares and businesses of the route—the physical pleasure of fresh air, bracing exercise, constant change—the physical discomfort of broken rest, bodily fatigue, bad accommodation—leave little or no room for subtler influences. It is but seldom that one can fully appreciate anything at the actual moment of seeing it. Mental as well as bodily food requires to be completely digested; and it is only when all is over—when mind and body are alike at rest—that the crowded impressions of a long journey give forth in all their fulness the pleasure which they were intended to yield, and the lesson which they were sent to teach.

A GOLDEN SORROW.

CHAPTER XXI.—INFLUENCE.

THE one touch of humanising taste about Reginald Clint was a love of music. As a young man, he had been a not despicable performer on the violin, and had sung well. But the essential unsociability of his disposition, the moroseness which prevented his ever deriving pleasure from the sources at which other people found theirs, was stronger in him than the taste for music, and he gradually relinquished the exercise of his own talent, and the enjoyment of that of others. His wife knew nothing of music. If she had been a fine performer, and had loved the art, he would probably have contrived to torment her through it; as it was, he made her deficiency in that respect a constant grievance. Miriam had been taught the harp and piano, in the regular routine of 'extras' at Miss Monitor's; but music was not in her. She played from notes

correctly, even expressively, but she could not converse with the taut strings, or the ivory and ebony tablets, winning them by the subtle spell of touch to be the interpreters of the desires of her heart, the yearnings of her fancy, the problems of her mind. Miriam's music was an accomplishment; Florence's music was an inspiration. Reginald Clint had never been touched or interested by the one; he had hardly had patience to listen to Miriam's playing, but by the other he was fairly fascinated. As he stood listening to the sounds, now solemn and mournful, anon gay and triumphant, something long forgotten or sternly set aside in the rough selfishness and cynical unbelief of his life seemed to steal into view again, and timidly claim his attention.

'That's real music,' he muttered; 'that's the kind of thing I used to think about, and long for, when—when there were any women about, and they were giving their feeble mimicry of it. It has been born with this girl, and not ill cultivated. Yes, that's real music,' he repeated, as Florence dwelt upon one grand chord, and then, releasing note after note, let it pass away in a murmuring ripple of sound. She had finished for the present, and Reginald Clint, with a glance upwards at the open windows, gave himself a shake, and continued his way to the fir-wood.

That evening he sent a quantity of music to Florence, old songs and out-of-fashion compositions of Italian and English composers, which he had loved in his youth. They had lain on the topmost shelf of a bookcase for years, and he had forgotten their existence. Now he had them dusted and conveyed to Mrs Dixon, with an intimation that he hoped she would study such of them as she liked. Again Mrs Ritchie wondered. Here was a totally unheard-of piece of politeness and attention on Mr Clint's part, and to a servant! She was destined to a further surprise on the same subject before very long.

Mr Martin's tolerably frequent attendance at the Firs had not been slackened of late. He could not do Mr Clint much good; there was but one thing to be prescribed in his case with any hope of effect—abstinence from intoxicating drinks, and he knew well his patient was incorrigible on that point. But he needed such medical care as Mr Martin could give, exclusive of the one act of the will which lay solely within his own power, and the doctor never quite lost sight of the interests of the absent son; never entirely ceased to hope for an opportunity of pleading his cause with effect, backed up by some favourable intelligence of his career, to be produced in evidence of his having become steady, industrious, and persevering. Mr Clint himself had never been any of these things to a remarkable degree, but that fact by no means tempered his expectations of them from Walter, or mollified his displeasure towards him.

Mr Martin was disappointed by Walter's silence. He had not written to his only friend in that part of the world, and he thought that looked bad. He knew that he had not written to his father, but he had not expected him to do that. The doctor was aware of the terms on which Mr Clint had given his son the money for which he had asked. But Mrs Ritchie had told 'Mr Walter's' friend of a letter from that dreadful foreign country which had come for Mrs St Quentin, and he very much wished to learn the nature of its contents. Arriving at the Firs shortly after Mrs Dixon's return, he met Mrs Ritchie in the hall, and she told him that Mrs St Quentin's maid had preceded her mistress to England, and was then at the Firs, and that she had heard about Mr Walter, who was getting on well, and had dug a good deal of gold. With a brief expression of pleasure at the intelligence, Mr Martin turned into the study, where he usually found his patient. Mr Clint was there, in his accustomed place, sitting in a deep arm-chair, with his feet upon another chair, a cigar in his mouth, and a tumbler of brandy-and-water at his elbow.

'That's bad, at this hour of the day,' said the doctor, whom Mr Clint had saluted with a curt nod.

'I daresay it is; you've told me so often enough, but I can't help it. It is the only thing which relieves those infernal pains all over me.'

'It has more to do with causing them. How are you to-day?'

'Much as usual. Won't you sit down?'

Mr Martin took a seat, and regarded Mr Clint with a quiet, meditative gaze.

'How's the cough?' he asked.

'Bad—constant, especially at night, and fatiguing.'

'How have you been sleeping?'

'Infernally ill—walking about my room for hours sometimes, because I'm too restless to lie in bed, and falling asleep when it's time to get up.'

'Just so.—You have heard from Mrs St Quentin?' This sudden change of topic was as eloquent of Mr Martin's meaning as he intended it to be; especially as he pointed it with a significant glance at the brandy-and-water, and a deprecatory shake of the head, familiar and odious to Mr Clint.

'Yes,' replied his patient irritably; 'she has sent her maid to remain here until she comes to England, and the woman says Miriam is all right.'

'I am glad to hear it. Is this maid the girl who went away with her?'

'Yes—Dixon. A very superior sort of person. You remember I told you how useful she was when I was ill in London, and she is quite an acquisition here.'

'I remember. I must have a talk with her.'

Then the desultory conversation took another direction, and Mr Martin did not make any allusion to Walter. He did not like Mr Clint's appearance, which indicated, to his experienced eye, the imminence of another fit of illness. He left him before long, and, as usual, unattended, and found Mrs Ritchie, also as usual, hovering about the hall.

'He isn't well, I'm afraid, sir?' she said.

'No, indeed, he is not,' replied the doctor.—'Can I see Mrs St Quentin's maid? I should like to have a few words with her.'

Mrs Ritchie replied, that she would call Mrs Dixon down immediately—she was in the up-stairs sitting-room; but Mr Martin prevented her, by going up-stairs himself instead.

Florence had been busy with the needlework which so ably assisted her in her assumed character; and when Mr Martin knocked at the door of her sitting-room, she was standing beside the central table, which was covered with snips of muslin and ribbon. She looked very pretty, and young, and sorrowful. He introduced himself, and the motive of his visit, with his customary directness, and then startled Florence by asking her abruptly if she could tell him anything about Mr Walter Clint.

'He has written to Mrs St Quentin,' she replied with a quickly beating heart.

'So I heard. Will you tell me what you know of his letters? You need not hesitate: I am an old friend of his, and quite in your mistress's confidence.'

A whole tide of recollections swept over Florence's mind—of the history of her husband's boyhood, and the part which the kind doctor had played in it. How hard it was to speak with Walter's best friend, of Walter, in the correct tone of respectful indifference! She told him as much of the history of Walter's enterprise as she thought he would have wished her to tell, and replied to Mr Martin's remark, that he had surely been sufficiently successful to warrant his writing to his father, that Mrs St Quentin had told her that Mr Walter Clint had made up his mind not to communicate with Mr Clint for another year, when he hoped to do so in the spirit of the promise he had made.

Mr Martin was walking softly to and fro before the windows, his head bent downwards, and his hands clasped behind his back. He stopped, and looked up, when she said this. 'I perceive you are in Mrs St Quentin's confidence altogether,' he said, 'since you know how Mr Clint and his son parted. I have no doubt that confidence is well placed, and that I am safe in imitating it. Walter Clint calculates, in this matter, with the cheerful confidence of a young man, and Mrs St Quentin has not seen her father for more than a year. I was about to write to her, when Mrs Ritchie told me that she had, very properly, done so; and that circumstances' (he looked very sharply at Florence here, but she bore the scrutiny calmly—the secret of Miriam's fatal mistake was not to be surprised from her)—'unexplained circumstances had prevented her coming to England. Mrs Ritchie believed, good woman, that Mr Clint wished for the society of his daughter. I am convinced that, in this, she is entirely mistaken, and that in sending you, as a substitute, Mrs St Quentin has done a very sensible thing. Now, Mrs Dixon—I am right in the name, I think?'

'You are right, sir.'

'I am going to speak quite plainly to you about Mr Clint. I am very glad you are here. He likes you, and I have never known him to like any other human being. The time is coming, not slowly, when all his independence and moroseness, all his violence and suspicion, must give way, under severe bodily suffering, and then, if you have the courage, and the charity, you may amply repay his daughter's confidence and regard, by taking care of him. You have had a slight experience of him in illness—are you brave enough to venture on a prolonged experience, and of a very serious nature?'

'I am,' said Florence, with tears in her eyes. 'Quite ready, for his daughter's sake. But—is he so very ill? He can go about as usual, and keeps his customary hours—at least, so far as I know.'

'Just so; but you know very little. Walter Clint must not defer the making of his peace with his father for another year, if he wishes to make it this side the grave. You may tell Mrs St Quentin this, and bid her communicate it to her brother. I have endeavoured to get at Mr Clint's thoughts in reference to his son more than once lately, but I have failed. There is something in the case which I do not understand, and yet I thought I knew it all—I saw enough of it, Heaven knows—some new cause of bitterness in Mr Clint's mind, which he is keeping hidden from me, and when I say that, I imply that it is hidden from every one. Walter Clint ought to know this, and to remove it, without any more than the inevitable delay, for the time in which his father will have an opportunity of changing his mind about him, of altering any dispositions he may have made to his detriment—*I know* nothing on this point, recollect, but I have a very strong conviction—will be short.'

'Do you mean that Mr Clint is in danger of death?'

'He is in an early stage of an incurable, internal disease,' replied Mr Martin solemnly, 'of which, I think, he is not quite unconscious, though he has never put a question to me, and it is very improbable he would listen to me, if I told him. I hinted, some weeks ago, that it might be well to have another medical opinion, on which he flew into a rage, and declared, with many oaths, that no doctor but myself should ever darken his doors, and that if I did not like the trouble of attending him, I might take myself off also. It is rather difficult to resist such an invitation, but I have resisted it for many years, and I shall resist it to the last. Tell Mrs St Quentin that, if you please. He may keep up, and about, and the people in the house with him may not perceive any material alteration in him for some time yet, but nothing, except the relinquishment of his habits, would give him a chance for the prolongation of his life. The complete break-down may come soon and suddenly, or it may be deferred some time, for he is a strong man still—but happen it must; and if you have come to take Mrs St Quentin's place, you ought to know what that implies, and to be sure you are equal to it.'

'I will obey your directions implicitly,' said Florence; 'and if I can only induce Mr Clint to allow me to attend him, I am not afraid of failing in doing so.'

'A delicate young creature,' thought the doctor, 'for such an undertaking, but with something so staid and steady about her, too, that I daresay she will do it admirably. A great turn-up of luck for Clint, that his daughter has sent this young woman in her place; she will be worth a dozen of Miriam. Why can't she come, I wonder? *Won't*, perhaps—or has caught an elderly Tartar.'

He continued aloud: 'You can write to Mrs St Quentin exactly what I tell you. Assure her that all in my power to do shall be done, and especially urge her to represent the condition of his father's health to her brother; that an attempt may be made to put an end to the unnatural state of things between them.'

'Is there anything I can do just now?'

'No,' said Mr Martin; 'there is not. Try to ingratiate yourself with Mr Clint, to let him get used to you. I suppose you know all his peculiarities?'

Florence replied that she did, and told Mr Martin some particulars of Mr Clint's illness in London.

'Just so,' he said; 'and next time it will be worse, and the time after worse again, and so on, until there will be no next time. I will say good-bye now, Mrs Dixon, but I am coming to dinner to-morrow, and by that time I suppose you will

have written to Mrs St Quentin.' He left her, and as he went down-stairs, he, too, like Mr Clint, thought: 'She looks like a lady.'

Florence sat down forlornly, and covered her face with her hands. A vision of her old home, in her childhood, when she had no notion that such family disunion, misery, concealment, cross-purposes, could possibly exist—a keen, sorrowful remembrance of her dead mother, came to her. 'Why were such things?' she thought. 'Why was the world so dreary, which was also so fair; and life so troublesome, which had such elements of happiness in it?' And no answer came to her but tears, and the cry in her heart, 'Walter, Walter!' What was she to do? That question did not long perplex her. She was to do her duty, to Walter's father and to Miriam—to watch for an opportunity of effecting a reconciliation, if possible—having previously endeavoured to procure her husband's permission to tell Mr Clint the whole truth.

She wrote her letters—one to Walter, one to Miriam—and walked down to the village to post them. On her return, as she was passing the lower range of rooms, to enter the house by a side-door, she observed Mr Clint in his accustomed place in the study-window, and saw that he was looking languid and ill. She had fulfilled her self-appointed task of aiding the housemaid to arrange his rooms in the morning, but had not seen him. Now he perceived her, and opening the long window, asked her to step into the room, as he wished to speak to her.

Mr Clint's study communicated with the formally furnished, unused drawing-room by a folding-door, which was usually locked, and over which a curtain always hung. Florence saw that the curtain had been drawn back, and the door was standing open.

'I heard you playing on the piano up-stairs,' said Mr Clint. 'You play very well indeed; it is a long time since I have heard such music, indeed since I have heard any worth listening to.'

'Thank you, sir,' said Florence. 'Mrs Ritchie told me you were so kind as to say you did not mind my using the piano, and that you sent me some music.'

'Will you try whether the piano in there is a good instrument, and not too hopelessly out of tune?'

Florence instantly complied. The piano was so placed that the performer was not visible from the study. She touched the keys, running over a brilliant voluntary of chords. The instrument was a good one, and in fair order. Florence told Mr Clint that she found it so, and he desired her to go on playing. She complied, and he returned to his study. She played on and on, giving herself up to the pleasure of the music she was making, so as to be almost unconscious of the presence of the mute listening figure in the adjoining room. When she had been playing nearly half an hour, the external door of the drawing-room opening into the hall was cautiously pushed a few inches ajar, and the face of Susan, the housemaid, appeared at it for a moment, unseen.

A brief glance sufficed to shew her Mrs Dixon at the piano, the door of communication open, and the curtain drawn back. She could not see Mr Clint, but she surmised that he was there, and going out by the side-door, she peeped through one of the windows of the study from the outside, and satisfied herself of the fact. Then she hastened to relate this portent to Mrs Ritchie, who received it with provoking indifference. She had taken her cue from Miriam's letter, and her resolution from the instructions of Mr Martin.

'You mind your own business, Susan, and leave Mrs Dixon to mind hers,' she said to the satellite. 'She knows what she 's about.'

'I daresay she does,' muttered Susan, indignant at being snubbed on Mrs Dixon's account; 'indeed I have no doubt of it. But I wonder whether Mrs St Quentin knows what *she* is about? I don't think she can, or she would remember there 's more old fools than one in the world.'

From that day forth, Florence was summoned to the drawing-room every afternoon to play on the piano for Mr Clint's delectation. Mr Martin was made acquainted with this newly found resource for his patient, who required his services still more frequently as the days went by. They brought some improvement in Mr Clint's spirits and temper; indeed all the inmates at the Firs had so much reason to congratulate themselves on the influence which Mrs Dixon exerted, that small jealousies gave way to the strength of self-interest. But they could all see that the sullen and imperious master of the Firs was ill, and suffering; they could all trace in his features, at once bloated and wasted, in the increasing shapelessness of his figure, and the listlessness which was growing upon him, until all his life became a mere desultory loitering, the slow poisoning of his besetting sin. Against that, nothing was strong; he could keep his temper under, with Mr Martin's threat of the possible result of letting it loose in his ears; but he could not keep from drink. That demon had got hold of him securely long ago, and his gripe was not to be loosened.

Florence told Miriam all the truth. The alienated daughter learned it with a sincere and decent sorrow, but without any of the keen agony which it must have caused her had she loved her father. Miriam did not suffer distance and separation to delude her; her former home was not one whit less distasteful to her in memory than it had been in fact; her father's character was in no degree less odious. She had only begun to doubt whether she had exchanged for the better, whether she had not accepted a more wearing slavery. In one respect she could not deceive herself—the present one was incomparably more degrading.

'I cannot come to you,' she wrote to Florence in every letter; 'he is unmanageable on that point, and I have too much at stake to take the alternative he offers me. O Florence, how I hate him! I am almost afraid to think how I hate him!'

So the time went on, and each day made Florence more useful to her husband's father, and more powerful with him. Mr Martin told her she was like the shepherd of the tribe of Judah, who charmed the evil spirit out of King Saul.

CHAPTER XXII.—FROM MIRIAM TO FLORENCE.

HOTEL BRISTOL, PARIS, *May* 186-.

MY DEAREST ROSE—You will be very much surprised to learn that I am in Paris, but your astonishment cannot surpass mine at finding myself here. I don't think I could ever get enough of Paris; so, of course, I am not at all sorry about the move. I will tell you the history of it all, which

is simply this. We were getting on very well at Rome—a dear old place, which I liked immensely, if it were only because it is so respectable, so different from the vagabond southern cities—and I had got into a very pleasant English set, with whom we arranged all our plans for Holy Week. I think I must have told you about them. Sir John and Lady Duffle of Duffle—Lincolnshire people; Captain and Mrs Bainbridge; the Graydons, and others. We made a charming little coterie, and I was brushing up my music considerably, for Claude Auchinleck, Colonel Bainbridge's nephew, is *fanatico*, and we had musical parties almost every evening. He insisted on practice too, I can tell you; and I was very glad of the opportunity. As to the place itself, it is too charming. I was so sorry I had always hated Roman history at Miss Monitor's, and thought mythology a bore; for I really felt quite ashamed of my ignorance when I found myself in the place where the heroes had had their triumphs, and the gods their votaries. But those dear *Lays* help one wonderfully, keeping one up to who was who, and what was what; and between them and Hawthorne, I got on very well, though I often saw Claude Auchinleck pulling his moustache to hide a smile, when I made some hazardous guess or other, a couple of centuries wide of the mark or the man. I'm sure I don't know how he came to be well informed, for he is only in the army, but he *is*. Altogether, it was very pleasant, and I had quite regained my spirits—though you must not think I had ceased to be sorry for the loss of *you*—and to think there was really a change for the better in Mr St Quentin, that he had made up his mind to let me alone, and be rational; and I was beginning to dislike him much less, in consequence—for, you know, I am not ill-natured, and get over things easily, *some* things, at least—when everything came to an end in a sudden explosion.

It is really so ridiculous, and at the same time so humiliating, that I can hardly tell you what happened. Mr St Quentin heard Claude Auchinleck say something one day about knowing the neighbourhood of the Firs very well, and then it turned out that he had been quartered at Winchester, and, having friends in our part of the country, had seen Drington and the Cookes, and visited them and a few other people living quite near the Firs. He was, I suppose, in one of his worst humours—his good ones, as I have found to my cost, are rare and superficial—for he took it into his head that Claude and I were old acquaintances, and that I had hidden the circumstance from him, pretending to have met Claude for the first time at Lady Duffle's, in Rome. My dear, you never witnessed such an absurd scene in your life, only that it was more annoying than funny, and that I lost my presence of mind in the first instance, through sheer amazement, and did not treat him with the contempt he merited; I made up for that afterwards, but not effectually—one cannot try back with perfect success on a sneer; it is weak if not spontaneous. He made a complete and pitiable idiot of himself—openly declared his belief that I habitually deceived him about my friends and my *correspondence*—harping on the old string, you see, darling—and ended by ordering me to prepare to leave Rome instantly. We should go, he protested, and without making our destination known to any one. What did I do? I laughed, having shaken off my first stupor of astonishment. What did I say? That I would not leave Rome until after Holy Week, until, indeed, all the engagements I had at present undertaken were fulfilled, for any command, threat, or entreaty that he could utter. He uttered a good many of the first two, I can tell you; what a fool I was to be taken in by his mild voice and courteous manners!—but my blood was thoroughly up, and he could make nothing of me. I did not condescend, just then, to give him any assurance about Claude Auchinleck; I merely sneered and laughed, and put the thing aside, as being much too contemptible for my notice; and then calmly told him *I would not leave Rome.* Of course he stormed, and said I must, that he would force me to do so. To this I replied, that he had better not try, for that I had fully made up my mind, having endured one insult from him, to endure no more, but to return to my father's house the moment he attempted to inflict another on me. And O Rose, how I did wish I had been telling him the truth! How I did wish I had the courage to do it! And how much ashamed of myself I was when I knew in my inmost heart I was telling him a falsehood, and that I should not do anything of the kind.

'I will leave the hotel,' I said, 'and go to every human being whom we know, intimately or slightly, in Rome, and tell them the story of your conduct. What will be thought of you, do you suppose? How will men regard the man who is avowedly terrified if his wife meets an old acquaintance, and whose mind is so evil that he constructs old acquaintances out of every stranger? Public opinion, it strikes me, will back the woman who will not submit to be accused of lying and dishonesty by a husband to whom she has always behaved well and dutifully.' This was a completely random shot, but it hit him hard, and true. He turned quite white, and when he answered me, which was not for some time, it was in a totally different tone. I was satisfied with the result, though it seemed to me odd that he should understand me so little as to believe that anything would tempt me to talk of my matrimonial grievances to strangers. But there is a coarse-mindedness about him, which exists, I suppose, in most men of his selfish and conventional stamp, and as it served my purpose, I did not complain of it on this occasion. When I saw the salutary effect produced on him by my threat, I yielded so far as to assure him that he was utterly mistaken, that I had never seen Claude Auchinleck until we met in Rome, and that I should never injure my own sense of self-respect so far as to deceive him in anything of the kind. I am perfectly certain he did not believe me, and that his suspicion remains firm and unchanged to the present moment.

The scene ended in his giving in, so far as our stay in Rome until nearly the end of April was concerned, and by my consenting to leave Rome then. I did not much care about staying longer; but I was not prepared for his proposing that we should go to Paris; I could not resist saying to him: 'Take care; you do not know how many old friends I may be casually introduced to in Paris. Had we not better go to Greece or Russia?' He took no notice of this, I must confess, impertinent speech of mine, and he has been quite civil to me ever since. I use the word civil advisedly. Don't be *too much* shocked, dear, good, and wise little woman as you are, when

I say *I am in hopes* he is leaving off caring about me. It will be such a relief if he really does leave off altogether. I shall be quite content, and he will be far happier, and everything will go on smoothly. If there be a bore which is altogether intolerable in life, it is the love of a man whom one does not love. I never understood rightly what the magnitude of the bore had been, until I found that I was ceasing to hate Mr St Quentin, when he left off being in love with me; and now, I have no doubt, we shall be quite a model couple. That he has left off, is quite certain; I am no longer told that I am beautiful, until I could almost find it in my heart to wish I could be ugly, for a change; and I am allowed to dispose much more freely of my time. I daresay Bianca, the lumpish, sulky, but not unskilful Italian girl who replaced you, dearest, as my maid, imagined herself, and was supposed by him to be an efficient spy upon my actions; but, as I had nothing to hide, she might earn her credit and her money to her heart's content, for anything I cared. The whole thing, of which he fondly believed me utterly unconscious, was merely amusing to me. I flatter myself, if I really wanted to carry out any little scheme of my own, as in the case of one that you and I know of, it is not an 'active and intelligent officer' of Bianca's calibre who should prevent me. So I amuse myself, and keep them occupied. I hid a carefully folded note from my dressmaker in the innermost recesses of my casket the other night, having previously allowed Bianca to see me draw it, with elaborate caution and tenderness, from the folds of my *corsage*, and then I dropped the key of the casket on the carpet before I went out. I hope she brought the note to Mr St Q., and that he fully appreciated the value of the prize, and paid for it accordingly. How vexed you will be with me, dearest Rose, and yet I know you will laugh! I must do him the justice to say all this nonsense has never interfered with his liberality to me. My own allowance is not half the money I have the absolute disposal of, and as I like his money, and do not like his love, it is fortunate that they are not regulated in proportion.

Here we are, in charming rooms, and in the best situation in all Paris. I enjoy it very much indeed, and am rather popular. Mr St Quentin is very good-humoured, and does not bother me. If I had you here, I should feel that my visions were being realised at last. That will come soon, I trust. If the accounts from Walter continue good, we shall soon be able to make the truth known. I am delighted, but not surprised, to hear that you are getting on well with every one at the Firs: because it is what I could never do, there is all the more reason for your doing it soon and easily. I wonder, were there ever two women in this world so different as you and I? It is very sad to read your account of papa, but I am not much alarmed. It is quite wonderful how men hold out against drink, especially when they have violent tempers, and get their own way in everything. He was always very strong, but not fond of much bodily exertion; and as to the fits of gloom you describe, he has been subject to them as long as I can remember, only he had not any one to play and sing him out of them. He never cared a straw for my efforts in that line; and, indeed, I believe he was right, for I am no musician. We ought to have letters from Walter soon. Now that you and Mr Martin are such good friends, you might perhaps find an opportunity of pumping him about papa's suspicions of 'Florence Reeve.' I have never forgotten Mr St Quentin's saying that Walter had taken some girl with him to America. I wish I might venture to bring up the subject again, but one never knows where a suspicion might arise, and it is better to be patient on the safe side, especially as there is a good chance that our patience may not be taxed much longer. I think you would find Mr Martin could give you information of how papa came to know or suspect anything, and how much he either knows or suspects. But do not try to find this out, unless you can entirely trust your nerves and your countenance, for Mr Martin is a 'smart' man. It is not easy to deceive him. I know, because I tried it a few times in trifling matters, in boyish scrapes of Walter's, and I failed signally. He always found me out, and told me so, before I had committed myself to unlimited fibs. So be careful, dearest Rose, and don't run risks, for, mind you, I don't believe anything would induce Mr Martin to connive at your remaining in so false a position, and he would be horribly angry with Walter.

I hope you are diligently executing all the needlework you took home to do for your exacting and imperious mistress. I wish you could see Bianca's face sometimes when I practise my clumsy tongue in her dialect, by dwelling on your perfections, and by ridiculing her ideas of dressing my hair. I entertain her in this way sometimes when Mr St Q. thinks proper to assist at my toilet; and it is quite funny to see (in the glass) the looks she steals at him. I did this first, when I was not certain whether she was in his confidence, and wanted to find out. The experiment succeeded perfectly. Dear creatures! If they only knew how easily I could hide anything I chose from their puny ingenuity, and with what ease and certainty I found *them* out, how vexed they would be! Neither of them has sufficient sense of humour to be amused, as I should be in their place, by such a discovery.

It must be dreadfully dreary for you at the Firs, my dearest Rose; though I know you will say it is not. Why are you so even-tempered and cheerful-spirited under such circumstances as yours? Don't imagine I am blaming you; I am only wondering at you. Good Heavens! If, in the first place, I *could* love any man as you love Walter, separation from him would drive me wild; and, in the second, a quiet life, *such* a quiet life under the circumstances would make me a complete lunatic. Graceless as I am, I can *admire you*, and, and—no; I was going to say what is not true, that I can wish to imitate you. I cannot—I do not feel the desire to be what you are—I am of the earth, earthy—of the world, worldly; and you have a considerable dash of the heavenly in your composition. I do believe I am more worldly since you left me—that I love money, and fine clothes, good living, jewels, horses, all kinds of show and excitement, much more than when we were together. That is certainly a testimony to *you*, if it is a bad sign in your most affectionate sister,

MIRIAM ST QUENTIN.

P.S.—This ought to have been posted three days ago, but was neglected. Things are not quite so comfortable. I danced three times with a certain Count Scalchi at the Embassy on Tuesday, and

met him at dinner next day, when he made himself agreeable. Mr St Quentin is watching *him* now, and I do verily believe *he* believes the man followed me hither from Rome. It is like nothing that ever happened, except the plots of the Spanish romances, and the plays of the Restoration, and after all, they did not happen! Fortunately, he cannot make me unhappy, but he may make me ridiculous, by making himself so. I wonder is he a little 'cracked?' He positively looks quite thin and yellow, and ever so much older than he used to look. I should not be surprised if he would not remain in Paris now, if this craze lasts. What dreadful inconstancy he must suspect me off! Not to *him, cela va sans dire*, but to Claude Auchinleck, and the mysterious gentleman who preceded him in my light affections, for whose effusions he would persist in mistaking poor Walter's letters. He never got the better of me on *that* point. By-the-bye, do you remember wanting me to shew him one sheet of a letter from Walter, a safe sheet, in which you were not mentioned (it was almost all about his friend, Mr Daly), in order to convince him that it really did come from Walter, and I would not? I never did, and I never will. If he persists in this present fit of absurdity, and makes any move, I am determined it shall be to England—and I shall carry my point, if I have to do it by threatening *to run away with Scalchi*, who would be exceedingly unlikely to consent to the arrangement.

Florence read this letter from Miriam with many contending feelings. The affection for herself which it expressed touched her deeply, but the picture it contained of Miriam's life, and her feelings, alarmed her. She could not help being amused by it, but at the same time she was heartily grieved. She did not believe that Miriam felt Mr St Quentin's distrustful and insulting jealousy so little as she pretended to feel it—pretended, not only to Florence, but to herself. She had a proud nature, and would wince under the insult of suspicion, however she might scorn the person who suspected her. And her strong sense and wholly unsentimental turn of mind would render a weakness, even if amiable, intolerable to her. How much more a weakness that was anything but amiable, and exceedingly insulting!

'Her life is much drearier than mine, in reality,' thought Florence, 'and has more real danger in it. I do not know from whence the temptation will come, or in what shape, but I am terribly afraid for Miriam.'

ENGLISH MONITORS.

THE name *Monitor* has been applied to a class of ships recently designed for the English navy, because they have low freeboard, fight their guns in turrets, and are without masts and sails. In other respects, however, they are notably superior to their American prototypes, although, owing to the wholesome dread of low freeboard, caused by the fatal loss of the *Captain*, they are modestly styled 'coast-defence ships,' and are intended chiefly for service in English waters. Four of them, bearing the names *Hecate, Hydra, Gorgon*, and *Cyclops*, are remarkable in these days of experimental shipbuilding as being of exactly the same design. The hull looks like a raft bearing upon it a fortress, from which rise a collection of funnels of various shapes and sizes and a flagstaff. It will be possible to step out of a boat on to the deck, which is only three-and-a-half feet above the water, is covered with an awning, and has rails all round it, both of which are removed before going to sea. The fortress, which is in the middle of the ship, and occupies one-third of her length and three-fourths of her breadth, contains all the means of communication between her interior and the outside world. The deck around it is unbroken, except by three small skylights, each formed by an armour-plate bent round into a cylinder a yard and a half in diameter, and surmounted by a glass cover, which will admit light to a limited portion of the space below, the residence of the officers and seamen, where they will hear the waves roll over their heads; and even this little light is cut off when in action, as the glass will have to be removed, and a shell-proof cover put in its place. The deck consists of two layers of half-inch iron plates resting upon the iron beams, and two layers of teak-planking four inches thick, probably enough to keep out all falling shot and shell. The armour-plating on the sides is eight inches thick amidships, an inch more than any of our masted sea-going ironclads, although many of them are two to three times the tonnage of these ships. They are thus practically superior in defensive armour to any ironclad cruiser afloat.

The fortress in the centre of the deck is walled in by a breastwork six feet high, covered with nine-inch armour, and enclosing the lower halves of the turrets and a space between them for the funnel, hatchway, &c. The turrets are entered from the space inside the breastwork, which is of sufficient size to allow a passage round outside each turret, likely to be of great use in action, if, by an enemy's shot, the turret should be damaged. It should be mentioned, that the American Monitors have no breastwork, and the turrets rise directly from the deck. Each turret, in the English Monitors, has in its centre a cylinder, fitting over another cylinder, attached to the deck below it, to keep it steady, even when it is revolving in rough weather. The turrets are turned by small steam-engines situated within the breastwork, but, in case of need, can also be turned by manual labour, applied by means of cranks. The upper and exposed parts of them are protected by nine-inch armour-plates, except that the plate through which the ports are cut is an inch thicker. The ports strike one as being ludicrously small, compared to old-fashioned ports; they look just large enough for the muzzle of the gun to come through; and are oval holes, about two feet across, and three feet and a half vertical diameter. The small port, and consequently better protection for the men at the guns, is one of the great advantages of the turret system, and is due to the fact, that the direction of the gun is altered by turning the turret, instead of moving the gun within the port. If, however, in action, the turret should get jammed, the only way of altering the direction of the gun will be by turning the whole ship. There are two twenty-five ton guns in each turret, throwing elongated shot of four hundred pounds weight, so that the whole broadside is equal to that of an old line-of-battle ship. There being nothing on the deck before and abaft the turrets, the guns will fire directly ahead and astern, and will be able to sweep the horizon. Each turret can be turned

through the complete circle, by the engine for that purpose, in less than a minute. It has been often said, with truth, that the turret system can only reach its full development in Monitors; when it is applied to ships with masts, the gun cannot be fired at will in any direction, and it is impossible to fire directly ahead or astern. Besides the impediments caused by the masts and ropes, there is the further disadvantage, that for the protection of the crew when at sea, it is almost necessary to still more obstruct the fire of the guns by a forecastle, which renders the turret guns wholly ineffective for a pursuing fire.

The *Hecate* and similar ships will be able to keep up a good fire either in running from an enemy or in chase. The part of the breastwork deck round each turret is straight and level, and an india-rubber collar, weighted with lead and attached to the turret, covers the aperture between it and the deck, rendering the whole practically watertight. Between the turrets, and from the breastwork deck, rises a thin iron casing to about the same height as the turrets, enclosing the funnel, &c., and surmounted by what is not inappropriately called the *flying-deck*. This is a railed-in platform, not merely covering the casing just described, but extending beyond it on all sides. It is eleven feet above the main-deck of the ship, thus being at a sufficient height to be clear of sea, even in rough weather, and contains sufficient space for the boats to be stowed when the ship goes to sea, for a promenade, and for a steering-wheel, which is used when not in action. It was at first intended that the *flying-deck* should extend over the turrets; this plan, however, was wisely modified: there is evidently danger (too often overlooked) in building over turrets any structure which may be so distorted by the enemy's fire as to impede the free turning of the turret. Besides the smoke-funnel and steam-escapes, three other funnel-shaped erections appear above the *flying-deck;* one of these, having a top very much like the chimney cowls which form so prominent a feature in London street architecture, is used for the unlooked-for purpose of discharging the ashes from the coals burnt in the engine-room. The only outlet from the ship in rough weather being through the flying-deck, even ashes have to be hoisted all this distance above the main-deck of the ship, before they can be thrown overboard. A small steam-engine is provided for this especial duty. Abaft the funnel is a vertical oval tube, extending to a height of seventeen feet above the main-deck, and sheathed with armour-plates, the upper plate of all shewing some small horizontal slits a few inches wide. This tube is the *conning-house*, and the slits are for the captain to look through without exposing himself to danger. Here, in a place where there is just room to turn round, will the captain stand in action, and, by mechanical telegraphs, direct the steering of the ship, her speed, the firing of the guns, turning of the turrets, and, if occasion arise, the ramming down of the enemy. The last of the funnels is the ventilating shaft for the supply of air to the whole of the ship. It runs down into the breastwork, where it divides into two parts; in each is a separate set of revolving fans for producing a downward current of air, which is conducted by pipes all through the ship, an outlet being provided in each cabin, with a tap, so that fresh air can be turned on *ad libitum*. The air is driven into the remotest corners of the ship's hold; and as there are two steam-engines to each branch of the apparatus, there appears to be little probability of a break-down in what must be so important a provision in ships of this class. One of the most remarkable features in these vessels is the extent to which machinery is used for every purpose. As has been already stated, there are two small steam-engines for turning the turrets, one for raising the ashes from the engine-room, and four for working the ventilating apparatus. There is also an engine for turning the capstan, and another for working the rudder.

Besides the four Monitors we have described, there are three which were built for colonial service. The *Magdala* of Bombay and the *Cerberus* of Melbourne are of the same size as the *Hecate;* and her sister, the *Abyssinia* of Bombay, is smaller and less heavily armoured. The design was originally prepared for the two first-named ships, but on the outbreak of the war between France and Germany, the Admiralty, seeing the desirability of having some ironclads for purposes of coast defence, ordered four more ships from the design already in hand. To enable the *Cerberus* to make the voyage to Melbourne, her side was built up, with thin iron plating, to a level with her breastwork deck for nearly all her length, and the intervening space closed in and decked over. It would be possible to give the *Hecate* and her sisters so much more freeboard, by a similar contrivance, as would enable them to keep the open sea in any weather. It may, perhaps, be thought, that instead of these ships, sea-going masted vessels might have been built, which could have been used for the same purpose. To this it may be replied, that such ships must necessarily draw more water than these; the latest type of sea-going ironclads afloat, whether turret-ships like the *Monarch*, or broadsides as the *Hercules* and *Sultan*, draw something like twenty-four feet of water; these vessels, though more heavily armoured, but sixteen, and consequently could, if taken at a disadvantage, run up a river out of the way of an enemy's sea-going ironclads, the only kind of ship which could, from the nature of the case, give them serious trouble. They could also manœuvre to great advantage in fighting near the shore. Besides this, there is the important consideration, that the coast-defence ships are but a little over two thousand tons, against the five thousand tons of the ships with which we have compared them, and the cost price is nearly proportional to the tonnage.

The *Glatton* differs from the other Monitors in being five hundred tons more burden, in having only one turret with guns, each weighing thirty-five tons, and throwing six hundred pounds shot, which would do execution at a distance of three miles and a half. She also draws about six feet more water, and has armour three inches thicker; and thus is, except in the *number* of guns, a much more powerful ship. The *Glatton* has a promenade deck, on a level with the breastwork deck, extending to her stern, in addition to a flying-deck somewhat similar to that of the *Hecate*.

It would be improper to dismiss the subject of English Monitors without some notice of those very large ships, the *Fury* (which will be the heaviest ironclad afloat), the *Devastation*, and the *Thunderer*. Like the coast-defence ships, they will have no masts or sails, but they are of great

draught of water, and are essentially sea-going ships. They will each carry four thirty-five ton guns, in two turrets, enclosed in a breastwork, and will have armour upon them from ten to fourteen inches in thickness. They were originally designed with a central fortress similar to that of the *Hecate*, and it was intended to leave the deck open all round it, so that they would have gone literally through, instead of over, the waves. It is now, however, decided, in the case of the *Devastation* and *Thunderer*, to carry up a light iron side to the level of the breastwork deck, which will be extended to meet it, and the whole closed in. They will thereby have a much larger margin of security than would otherwise have been the case; and will be perfectly safe at any angle to which they are likely to be inclined at sea. It is yet undecided whether a similar alteration will be made in the *Fury*, the building of which is, for the present, suspended.

All the ships which are without masts and sails are propelled by twin screws, so that if one propeller were carried away, the vessel would be perfectly manageable, and would merely lose speed. The English Monitors and the *Fury* class of ships both present an appearance altogether unlike our old ideas of a man-of-war; they are not so much like ships as floating fortresses; and the prediction of a First Lord of the Admiralty, some years ago—that in a short time we should want no sailors, seeing that our ships would only require stokers and artillerymen—appears to be in a fair way of being verified.

A COUNTING-HOUSE ROMANCE.

IN NINE CHAPTERS.—CHAPTER V.

THE course of true love is not the only course which seldom runs smooth, and Mr Vann found one or two obstacles in his way, which, although of no great moment as regarded the ultimate success of his plan, were yet very annoying, as causing a delay, and keeping him out of the harvest he fairly considered his own. In the first place, his sporting friend, as he learned from some mutual acquaintance at the *Dover*, was absent on a tour, 'following the races,' and would not be in town for a long time. Then, not only had Mr Ambrose Perrow gone to Brighton for awhile, but even when his wife and family returned, he did not do so, having been called to Germany on some unexpected business connected with the firm. These were irritating incidents, nor were they all, as will be seen; but neither those detailed, nor those yet to be spoken of, affected Vann's behaviour at the office; nor was it in the power of Mr Perrow, nor of any human being in his place, to divine that his solitary, attentive clerk carried in his mind a secret of such ruinous importance.

Beyond the drawbacks just alluded to, Vann was now sorely pushed by a run of such bad luck in his betting transactions as he had never known from the first day he had backed a horse; it was no matter what he did, however fair the prospects, however great the certainty, no sooner did he invest his money on any animal than it was sure to meet with some mishap. By these misfortunes he was reduced to greater straits than he had suffered since he had entered the service of Perrow and Son; not only had his old stock of pawn-tickets come back, with considerable additions, but his landlady complained that she had now as much trouble in getting her rent from Mr Vann as she had ever had with the very worst of her lodgers.

Even this tribulation, great as it was, was not so serious as was the fierce and unmanageable temper of his sister. He had had to submit to ask her for money, to beg money from her to meet his every-day requirements, and her taunts were hard to bear. He found, too, that she had only spoken the bare truth when she had admitted her fondness for strong drink; and as their interviews became more frequent, he was sometimes almost terrified by her unrestrained bursts of passion, which were so furious, that he had on one occasion left the house hastily, lest she should wound him in her frenzy. Yet he was obliged to borrow money of her, and to beg it with the most humiliating pleas, and to accept it when given with the most insulting words. Beyond even these things in annoying and alarming Vann was a capricious obstinacy which seemed to take his sister every now and then, and made her declare that she would not move in the matter of finding her fugitive husband. She appeared quite earnest, too, in this assertion, and although to Vann such conduct savoured of insanity, yet he was afraid that some day he should find the fit a lasting one, and that all his anxiety and trouble had gone for nothing; for he well knew he dared take no step which was at all objected to by her.

While, however, no fresh excursions fell to his lot, the clerk saw more of Miss Bessy than he had hitherto done; for, in view of the aggrandisement he proposed to himself, he insensibly became a little bolder, and was unexpectedly aided by a sudden increase of friendship on the part of the baker himself, who had heretofore been too phlegmatic, not to say bearish, to take much interest in him or anybody else. This was a great step gained, and Vann felt that the path was smoother when he was allowed to visit the back parlour at least once a week, and when the baker took more pleasure in listening than talking. This change emboldened Vann the more, because he could not help connecting it with the vague hints of coming prosperity which he had permitted to escape him in Mr Capelmann's presence, and with which the latter seemed considerably impressed. Although his intimacy with the young lady herself had not advanced very perceptibly, he felt that to have pleased her father was no small thing.

And so Vann waited, as patiently as might be, until the time came round when his sister's annuity was nearly due, about which period his sporting friend returned to London, and Mr Ambrose Perrow came back from Germany. Directly he heard this last piece of intelligence, he obtained leave of absence, and hurried off to his sister at Greenwich, his errand being to warn her that she would probably have an opportunity of seeing Mr Ambrose within the next few days.

It happened, most unfortunately for him, that he had promised to repay his sister, on this very day, the various sums he had borrowed of her, and which amounted in the aggregate to a considerable figure. He had named this day at hazard, in consequence of her insisting that a date should be fixed, but without the slightest tangible reason for thinking he should be able to keep his word. He felt compelled to see her as soon as possible, after learning the return of his employer; but as he

drew near her residence, his reluctance to face her grew very strong, for he pictured a very unpleasant scene as awaiting him; and he was right. He was kept waiting in the back room, and on the same plea as before—that her landlord was with his sister. He had suspected as much, for a small pony-chaise which stood at the door seemed unaccountably familiar to him. When this was heard to drive off, his sister called to him, and her first question, spoken the moment he entered the room in which she sat, was to know if he had brought the money. He tried to evade this by hurrying on to the more important business, as he deemed it, and wished her to see, with him, how trivial everything else was in comparison; but she chose to harp on the subject most unpleasant to him, and that in the most unpleasant manner. She told him of the contempt in which she held him and all his schemes; how she would assist in none of them; that she should be better off with her little annuity in peace, than with any wealth, if he were to sponge upon her; and much more pleasant discourse. Her husband might have twenty wives, for all she cared, so long as he kept her annuity paid, and Vann might carry his treachery and scheming elsewhere. In addition to all this, there was a something lurking behind, more powerful than the rest, and which restrained her brother from breaking out into violence. Although she did not speak openly of it, yet there were dark allusions to something which made him shrink back, when more than once he had seemed galled beyond endurance. At last, he succeeded in quieting her sufficiently to induce her to listen; but this was only gained by his asserting in the most solemn manner that a certain payment from the firm was postponed for a month, which payment, it is scarcely necessary to say, existed only in his own imagination. He was confident, however, that a crisis was at hand, the results of which would blot out or compensate for the past, and put him thoroughly at ease, long ere that day month. His conference was brief, as when he had told her that she would soon be able to see Mr Perrow, he had told all; and the rest of the interview was spent in the more difficult task of borrowing a sovereign. With great persuasion, he succeeded in doing this, and then left hurriedly, for his sister seemed fast relapsing into the bad temper she had so recently displayed.

A few nights after this he went again to the *Dover*, and being lucky enough to meet his sporting acquaintance, lost no time—after a few indispensable inquiries respecting the past racing season—in coming to the subject now chiefly in his mind, but with indifferent success. His comrade appeared to be very chary of talking much about this, and answered very briefly, almost ill-temperedly. Still the clerk was not easily to be put off, and he grew more pressing, until at last the man said: 'Look here, old fellow, you and I are very good pals, and you have got as much sharpness in racing matters as any fellow I ever came across. But I don't know anything of your private affairs, and I'll take very good care you don't know much of mine. As for Mr Perrow, I'll tell you this much: he came out just before I came home, but where he came to and where I came from, I shan't tell.'

'Well, but I don't want to know anything about your private affairs, my friend,' urged Vann; 'I wouldn't pry into them for the world. It can't be letting me into any secret, if you merely say where you met him. If you could only tell me whose ship he went out in, it would perhaps be enough.'

'It might be too much,' said the stranger curtly; 'it would be too much, because it would be telling you something you want to know, and perhaps will get a lump of money by knowing, while I shan't touch a coin. Besides, you clearly don't mean me to know much about you, and so I don't mean you to know anything about me.'

'Well, come now: if I tell you all about myself,' said Vann, 'will that do?'

'It would certainly go a goodish way,' said the man thoughtfully. 'Well, who are you?'

'My name is Vann—Frederick Vann. I am clerk at Perrow and Son's, and I live at 31 Parble Street, City Road,' was the reply. 'Will that satisfy you?'

'It goes a goodish way, as I just said,' returned the man, still more thoughtfully. 'I'll write that down. I suppose you can prove you are the party, because you may be Methuselah, for all I know. But it goes a goodish way, because, as you're clerk to this party, you're very likely to have got hold of some sort of secret about him, that you can't quite prove, and that you think I can. Now, I don't mean to tell you anything to-night'——

'What!' ejaculated Vann, 'not to-night?'

'Not to-night,' repeated the stranger, very slowly. 'It won't hurt; if your secret has kept some years, it can keep a week longer. Now, give me some person's name as a reference—two, in fact, that I may see if their stories agree about you.'

'What the devil can it matter?' exclaimed Vann, who was losing his temper at the other's slowness and selfishness.

'Oh, it matters thus far,' said his friend: 'I see you can't very well do without me, and I mean to think it over, and make sure of my man, before I trust him.'

'Confound it, then!' said Vann angrily, 'there is my sister, Mrs—Mrs White, of Orange Street, Greenwich; and Mr Capelmann, baker, at the corner of Parble Street, where I live.'

The stranger took his pipe from his mouth, thrust the tobacco farther into the bowl, replaced the pipe, and began smoking again, without taking his eyes from Vann's face for a moment. 'What names did you say?' he asked at length. Vann repeated them, with his vexation apparent in every syllable; but the other was calm as a statue, and with a precision which jarred on the fretted nerves of the clerk, deliberately wrote down the names and addresses. 'Thank you,' he said; 'that will do. Now, I will meet you this day week, if all goes well, and we will see if we can't put our horses together. And talking of horses, have you heard that *Musketoon* has been specially reserved for the steeple-chase this year?' He went on with his new theme, to which Vann could at first barely listen with patience; but soon it had its effect, and he found himself greedily devouring every particular relative to the 'good thing,' and finally parted with his ally on better terms than he could have deemed possible an hour earlier.

But ere the week came round, Vann had obtained nearly all the evidence he wanted without him. It was again a very busy time at Perrow and Son's, and Mr Ambrose was almost constantly at the office. Vann, from his position of confidential clerk, was in his presence a great deal, and had

opportunity to note that his master constantly wore his left-hand glove. This, of course, strengthened his suspicions; but he saw him change his gloves one morning, and saw plainly enough that he had but three fingers upon his left hand. This he noted in his usual stealthy way; but furtive as was his observation, he was discomfited by finding in the glance he could not help stealing at his employer's face, that the latter's eyes were fixed full upon him, and that his discovery was most assuredly known. Only a smile of utter contempt marked Mr Perrow's sense of his clerk's vigilance, but it was enough to make the latter hate him more than he did before—an addition quite unnecessary. His self-command was in no way affected, nor was it when, on the next morning, he heard the same gentleman tell his father that he was going to Drury Lane that evening, and that he had taken a box. Vann at once resolved that this was the time for his sister to see her fugitive husband; and as it was an early night for him at the office, he telegraphed to her to meet him at the London Bridge Station. Having done this in his dinner-hour, he went on quietly with his work for the remainder of the day.

He met his sister at the rendezvous; that was in itself a great relief, for he was more than half-afraid that some ill-timed burst of temper might have kept her at home. She came; and although a little sarcastic and insulting in her tone, was as civil as he ever hoped to find her. On their road to the theatre, he told what he had learned, with complete candour too, because he was afraid of her determined efforts to worm everything out, and because he could not see that he should benefit himself by withholding anything. She agreed with him that if she could identify Ambrose Perrow as her husband, that there was no great need of the betting friend's evidence, yet counselled Vann to meet him, as he might know something worthy their hearing: he might prove, for instance, that Mr Perrow was, about the period of his marriage with her, habitually called Malton, and this, of course, it was desirable to establish.

They arrived at the theatre in time to get a seat in the centre of the pit, a post from which they could easily note the occupants of the boxes. It was arranged that Vann should not say whether he saw Mr Perrow in the house or not, to avoid giving anything like a bias to his sister's judgment; but there was no need for any precaution. They had scarcely taken their places before she whispered: 'There he is—that tall man just entering the box on our left. Is it your master?'

'Yes,' said Vann.

'Oh, I know him well enough,' continued his sister: 'he has more beard, whiskers, and moustache than he had in our honeymoon, but I know him. And that is his second wife, is it? Lend me the glass, Dick. He has a good eye for beauty. I was counted handsome, you know, and she is so, to a certainty. Proud expression; maybe we shall alter it for her. He is looking full at us, Dick, but with no more consciousness in his face than if he were gazing at so many Dutch herrings, instead of the most dangerous reptiles the world can produce. So that is my husband, and I am Mrs Perrow, am I? I have represented sixty pounds a year of his income for some time past; I wonder how much I shall represent in future. He would get off easier if there was only one of us in it. He is looking this way again. Aha, spouse! you are looking at the junior partner in the firm of Perrow, Perrow, and Vann. Why, Dick, you start. Don't you suppose a mole could see what you had made up your mind for?'

In this manner she ran on at every opportunity. Her brother would have left the house directly the identity was established; but she, with amazing calmness, determined on hearing the whole of the performance, and evidently enjoyed it, down to the last line of the concluding farce; for although she was gazing into her husband's box, and making comments upon him and his wife in the intervals between the acts, she hardly ever so much as glanced at him while the performance was going on. Vann was heartily glad when all was over, and they just succeeded in catching the last train from London Bridge.

CHAPTER VI.

There was very little now for Vann to wait for: the man was identified, the proofs of the marriage were easily obtained; the evidence was so direct and overwhelming, that there was slight probability of Mr Perrow attempting to confront it. It was time, then, to commence operations. It was wonderful, even to himself, how different a man he felt, now that wealth and position were in his grasp; his very step seemed more assured, and literally, as well as figuratively, he held up his head in consequence of his approaching aggrandisement. While he was making up his mind as to what he should first do, this alteration shewed itself chiefly in a swaggering demeanour, a curt style of reply to his superiors, and an insulting bearing to his equals and inferiors—this last laying him open to the suspicion of strong drink before dinner.

After much cogitation, he determined upon taking the bull by the horns, and, as he expressed it, half aloud, with a slight confusion of figure, 'so getting old Perrow into a corner at once.' One slight annoyance was occasioned by his friend at the *Dover* leaving word with a mutual acquaintance that he should not be able to see him for a fortnight, as he was forced to be out of town; but this, after all, was now of little consequence.

It happened that, as he passed Mr Capelmann's shop on his road home from the sporting rendezvous, he saw the corpulent baker standing at his door smoking, while his assistants closed the establishment for the night. 'How do you do, Mr Vann?' said the baker. 'I was at this moment thinking of you.'

'I am delighted to hear it,' returned Vann, 'and assure you it was mutual. I was thinking of your family, and I always am.'

This was a flowery speech for the silent clerk, but he had had much internal debate as to the propriety of a man in his position entangling himself with a baker's daughter, when he might look so much higher, and had at last decided in favour of Miss Bessy. He was very much in love, for one thing, and this was a very rich baker, for another. The baker stared at him for a few seconds, and then smiled, which Vann thought a good omen; and after drawing a few more whiffs, Mr Capelmann invited the clerk in for the ordinary refresher. As they sat over their grog, the clerk summoned courage to ask where Bessy was, and found she had gone to a concert with Mr Banner. This would, but a very few weeks ago, have silenced

Vann for the evening, but he now said boldly: 'I think, Mr Capelmann, your daughter is throwing herself away—quite away, sir, on such a man.'

'I am sorry to hear you say so,' returned the baker, with no trace of anger, however, in his tone; 'I never heard anything against the young fellow.'

'Oh!' ejaculated Vann, with a contemptuous wave of the hand, 'the man may be well enough in himself, sir; I have nothing to say against him as an individual; but it's the position, sir, the position! There are men, Mr Capelmann, on whom fortune, and as I say, position, are just dawning, who would be happy to lay all at the feet of such a girl as Bessy.'

'I am afraid not,' said the baker; 'such persons are not common.'

'They are to be found, however,' said Vann, rising and buttoning his coat, with the resolute air of a man who has made up his mind to say no more; 'but I will not intrude any longer, sir. I am not talking at random, Mr Capelmann, and shall be happy to wait upon you shortly—say Friday night—to prove that I am not. May I hope to see you then?'

'Oh, certainly, Mr Vann,' said the baker, on whose face was a quiet smile, as if he rather enjoyed Vann's high-flown speech, than otherwise; and so, with an unusually prolonged shake of the hand, the clerk bade farewell to the person whom he regarded as virtually his father-in-law. He made the appointment because he had fully resolved to make an opportunity at once for clearing up all matters with the firm; he felt certain that nothing was to be gained by waiting any longer, and he determined, accordingly, that he would not wait.

He had been undecided at first whether he should speak to the partners together or singly, and if the latter—the plan he felt the more inclined to choose—which he should first approach. But this point fortune decided for him, at the same time that she strung his nerves anew. Mr Ambrose Perrow left the office early in the day, apparelled as though he was going on a journey; but before he left, he brought out a number of papers from the inner office, and told one of the junior clerks to sort and docket them; as the youth advanced to take them, Mr Ambrose changed his mind, and tossed them very unceremoniously to Vann, saying as he did so: 'Oh, you can do them, Vann; you seem to have no better employment than to listen to what is going on.' This might have been true at the moment, but it was not just to Vann, who was really one of the most assiduous clerks in the establishment; and it was a most unfortunate speech, as its contemptuous tone would have supplied an animus, had it been lacking before. Vann smiled as he took the papers; he did not mean to do so, but he could not help it, and he smiled in so odd and unpleasant a manner, that his master opened his lips, as though about to commence an angry speech, but checking himself, turned short round, and left the office.

Vann, in lieu of continuing his work, leaned his chin on his hands, and gazed abstractedly in the direction Mr Ambrose had gone, until the sound of the gong from the private room aroused him. 'Never mind, Jarvis,' he said to the youth whose duty it was to answer—'never mind; I will go.' So he answered the bell with a very steady step and a very resolute bearing. His chief looked up as he entered, and did not seem pleased at finding it was not the usual clerk; the frown on his brow was probably owing to his observation of what he considered Vann's eccentric manner of the last few days.

'I did not wish to trouble you, Mr Vann,' said the old gentleman; 'but as you are here, take these invoices to Mr Powle, and tell him to see if the errors complained of have been corrected. And, if I ring again, send Jarvis in. I do not like my clerks to run in and out just as they please. You can go, Vann,' he added sharply, seeing that his clerk lingered.

'I do not wish to go without ten minutes' conversation with you, Mr Perrow,' returned Vann—'conversation which will be very important, and must be strictly private.'

'Eh?' ejaculated his master, looking inquiringly at him, then added, more sharply still: 'You must see me to-morrow; I am busy.'

This was just the cavalier treatment which Vann secretly hoped he might receive: he was a coward, and he knew it, but with the crushing leverage he could wield, he feared not even his master. So he laid aside at once the deferential air proper to a clerk, and said: 'I will thank you, Mr Perrow, to make your convenience suit mine, for once. I have a great deal to say to you, and I mean to say it now; fill your office if you choose, but if you do so, I shall say what I wish, to ears that you would give your life to make stone-deaf.'

The expression of intense astonishment which Mr Perrow had at first worn, as he pushed back his chair to gaze at his clerk more fixedly, changed to one of alarm ere he had finished, and for a few seconds the old gentleman made no reply. At last he said: 'You have always been a good servant, Vann, and, I suppose, would not trouble me if you had not something to say which you deemed of importance. It should be very important to justify this language; but I am reluctant to alter my opinion of you, and will therefore hear you.'

Vann laughed; it was only a little laugh, but it was as full of vulgar triumph as the coarsest guffaw that ever came from the lips of a boor. 'Now, Mr Perrow,' he said, coolly seating himself, and drawing his chair close to the table, 'you were kind enough to compliment me upon my being a good servant. We will drop all allusions to master and servant, if you please, until we see how we really do stand. I am a bad hand at beating about the bush, so we will go to the point at once.'

'I am glad to hear it, sir,' said Mr Perrow, his indignation getting the better of the foreboding which his clerk's manner had inspired; 'the shorter you make this interview, the better I shall be pleased.'

Vann laughed again, but wetted his lips with his tongue, and coughed, as though, after all, he found his task less easy than he had anticipated. 'I—I had a sister,' he began. Mr Perrow at once put down the newspaper he had been feigning to read, and looked steadily at him. Vann went on: 'I had a sister, whose name was Harriet, and we lived together; she kept house for me down in Lancashire. It is a good many years ago now, but she is much the same as she was then—a violent, fierce-tempered woman. There was a man who was always hanging about our place; he called himself a gentleman, and—— Oh, curse it!' Vann exclaimed viciously, 'I can't shilly-shally like this.

Look here! Mrs Jane White of Greenwich is my sister Harriet; your son is her husband; he has committed bigamy, and his child is illegitimate. This secret is worth money—a good deal of money—and I want to hear if you will bid high enough to make me keep it.'

Old Mr Perrow had turned very pale during this speech, and had once laid his hand upon his heart, as though some spasm there had stung him; but he kept his eyes steadily on his clerk's face, and waited patiently until he had finished. He was reckoning with all the clearness and coolness of his character how he could best meet this attack, but was well aware, ere Vann ceased speaking, that there was no real defence to be made. 'Do you mean the woman to whom Macbennoe and Company send the cheque?' he began. 'Has she been concocting'——

'Don't I tell you that she is my sister!' interrupted Vann. 'What need for her to concoct a tale, when I know all as well as she does? If you have any doubt as to her being my sister, you have only to close this interview in an unfriendly spirit, and evidence to confirm every tittle I have said shall be forthcoming.'

'But your story is so strange,' urged the merchant, and as he spoke he felt that he might just as well have given up every show of dispute, if he could find nothing better to say: 'you present yourself before me without any evidence at all, even of a marriage having taken place between your sister and some one else, let him be whom he may.'

'So far as that goes, if you think it of any consequence,' said Vann, 'I can satisfy you at once. Here is the certificate: I daresay you will remember your son's travelling alias.'

The old gentleman, with hands that shook so as almost to prevent him from reading the document, took the paper and read. 'Yes—"Alfred Malton—Harriet Gyllon—18th March 18—." So far all is right, Mr Vann. There is no doubt but that a Mr Alfred Malton was married on that day; nevertheless—— But stay! did you not say the lady was your sister? If so, why is she described as Harriet Gyllon? Was she married under a false name also?'

'Well, I ought to have said that she was only my half-sister,' explained Vann, with some hesitation; then suddenly rousing himself, as though he wished to shew he was tired of the discussion, said: 'All this is wasting time, as you must be aware, Mr Perrow. I feel quite certain you know just as well as I do that your son's only lawful wife is Mrs White, as you choose to call her, of Greenwich. If you allow me to leave to-day without that fact being unreservedly acknowledged—I mean as far as you and I are concerned—I go straight to a police office, and put the matter beyond our control. On the other hand, I have no hesitation in saying that my object is compensation, and that you can buy our silence for ever.'

There was a little feeble fencing on the part of Mr Perrow after this, just enough to keep up appearances; but as the old gentleman saw the character of the man he had to deal with, and knew it was in that man's power to prove everything he said, and most probably send his only son to a prison, he quickly divined that the safest policy was to buy his silence, as was so plainly demanded. So, after a very painful half-hour, during which the insolence and triumphant air of Vann grew more marked, as the resistance of his adversary grew more feeble, the clerk left with a promise from the old merchant that on the next morning he would see him, and make him an offer.

There is no need to dwell upon the interview which took place that night between Mr Perrow senior and his son. The latter, after a run of a hundred odd miles by rail, was just sitting down to dinner, when his father was announced, and Ambrose felt there was something ominous when he received a message that the old gentleman wished to see him in his private room, in lieu of coming, bustling and cheerful, into the dining-room, as was his wont. Ambrose rose instantly, for he felt that some serious business must be on hand; but the dishonouring of every bill held by the firm would not have blanched his face so completely as did that five minutes' conversation with his father. Every possible device to baffle, or even delay the scheme of Vann collapsed and vanished like air-bubbles. Each of the partners felt, and said, that if it had been any other man in the whole establishment, any man but this one, they could have made better terms with him. With Vann there was no hope but that a tremendous ransom would be exacted. Once Mr Ambrose suggested flight; but the ruin and exposure involved in this idea realised the very worst results which could be brought about, and besides he could, in most countries, be arrested, if discovered; so this idea was abandoned. The firm was very rich, and the partners decided that the best thing to be done was to buy off their enemies at any price, and persuade them, if possible, to go abroad.

'Curse him!' said Ambrose, when he was alone. 'I know now why his hang-dog face reminded me so strongly of her. I ought to have known it was no mere chance resemblance.'

THE POET.

Give honour to the poet. Who shall tell
The all of joy he doth bequeath—confer?
Give honour to the poet, speak him well,
God's high Commissioner.

Unsparing of his sacred power, he weaves
And scatters far and wide, with lavish hands,
His priceless fancies, which he, dying, leaves
As heirlooms of the lands.

Things all denied to us he sees and hears,
Trust me, both when he wakes and when he sleeps;
And nought, of all that greets his eyes or ears,
Unto himself he keeps.

Feasts, mental feasts he hath, so rare, so rich—
Feasts that no care provides, no gold procures—
Grand feasts and glorious, every one of which
He maketh mine and yours.

So speak him well, the Poet, Prophet, Seer,
Roamer of realms which foot hath never trod,
Brave Templar, intellectual Pioneer,
And great High-priest of God.

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